

## **Educational Quality at the Mexican Elementary Level: Hegemonic Imaginary and Promise of Fulfillment**

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### **Abstract**

The subject of quality has been widely commented on in modern educational discussions: it has been the object of debate among different international organizations and has been revisited in the documents that regulate Mexican educational policy. Especially at the elementary level, there has been an ongoing effort to define what should be understood when speaking of educational quality. One of the dimensions of the current debate that has served as a condition for the emergence of the subject of quality has to do with the supposed completion of the goal of coverage and the need to guarantee not only that all children get into school, but that they also actually learn in their passage through the classroom. In this proposition, is possible to observe a structural dislocation and the creation of a new mythical space of representation that promises greater fulfillment. Thus, the possibility of interpreting quality is created as a hegemonic imaginary from the particular perspective of Political Discourse Analysis represented by Ernesto Laclau.

**Keywords:** Educational quality, International organizations, World Bank (WB), United Nations Organization for Education, Science and Culture, Regional Office for Latin America and the Caribbean (UNESCO OREALC), Education for All (EPT), Mexican educational policy, National Accord for the Modernization of Elementary Education, Program for Educational Development, National Education Program 2001-2006, Political Discourse Analysis, Hegemonic imaginary.

### **Introduction**

In this paper, it is proposed to briefly deal with the establishment of educational quality as a hegemonic imaginary that is currently relevant. For this purpose, it is reviewed what has been debated during the last two decades, both in international organizations as well as with regard to national educational policies, in relation to the deficiencies in the educational system and how to make up for these inadequacies. It is focused especially on documents from the World Bank (1994); the United Nations Organization for Education, Science and Culture, Regional Office for Latin America and the Caribbean (UNESCO-OREALC, 1992); and Education for All (EFA, 2004), all of them written for principal purpose of presenting the indicators and factors that have to do with educational quality. In the national sphere, three documents are

analyzed which guide educational policy: the Acuerdo Nacional para la Modernización de la Educación Básica [National Accord for Modernization of Elementary Education] (ANMEB, 1992); the Programa de Desarrollo Educativo 1995-2000 [Program for Educational Development 1995-2000] (PDE); and the Programa Nacional de Educación (2001-2006) [National Education Program].

After identifying the arguments put forth by international and national voices regarding what needs to be done to improve elementary education, it is possible to link the arguments that allow me to point to an educational crisis that needs to be remedied through the objective of quality. This is necessary in order to focus later on one of the key points of the educational debate: the change in priorities from satisfying the system's numerical needs, specifically coverage, in order to propose the urgency of emphasizing now the matter of performance and effective learning in the classroom.

This proposition allows to observe in educational quality the new mythical space of representation where the educational sphere can be reflected more fully, which also constitutes the threshold for the characterization of this signifier as a *hegemonic imaginary* widely used in the current educational framework.

## The Emergence of the Meaning of Educational Quality

Since the decade of the 1980s, various different agencies have been working on a great number of viewpoints regarding the meaning of educational quality or of the "variables" that have to do with improving it. Some, as UNESCO-OREALC, have focused on cognitive processes generated in the classroom space; others, such as the World Bank, prefer to see educational quality from a macro perspective and using external variables to the school environment; that is, including factors relating to the community and to educational policy that have an impact on improving student performance, as well as the exploitation of material and economic resources from the point of view of "cost-benefit". The Education for All movement has also offered educational quality indicators, with a special emphasis on the use of international resources in poor or "developing" countries.

To give quality a meaning, every one of these actors revisited a series of educational research studies carried out in the decade from 1980 to 1990 in different parts of the world. That is, the meanings for understanding educational quality in each one of these agencies were picked up from different academic papers whose aim was to figure out the variables that contribute to elevating children's educational performance at the elementary level. This can be understood as the enunciation of floating signifiers available for providing educational quality with a meaning. In the case of the World Bank, in its document *Improving the Quality of Primary Education in Latin America and the Caribbean. Toward the 20<sup>th</sup> Century* (1994), it specifies that:

In general, at least 100 research reports have been identified that were carried out for the purpose of studying the factors that determine educational performance. However, only 18 reports written in the last 20 years specifically include productive functions, which provide a more objective basis for the study of these relationships than those that use other statistical techniques or qualitative analysis (WB, 1994, 1, 38).

For its part, UNESCO-OREALC, in its document *Measuring the Quality of Education: Why, How and For What?* (1992), posits that:

The publications that deal with the subject of quality in education show its preponderance in the discussions and research in Latin America during the last decade. Thus, toward the end of the 80s, there already exists a quite substantive

accumulation of data that show the central aspects under discussion and the problems that are taking shape (UNESCO-OREALC, 1992, 15-16).

At the same time, EFA states in its document *The Quality Imperative* (2004) that “in the eighties, studies regarding the factors that determine effective teaching began to produce more coherent results” (EFA, 2004, 43, 89, 77). Thus, in the documents referred to, which were prepared for the principal purpose of offering content in relation to what educational quality should mean, it is possible to trace the process through which the meaning of educational quality was gradually developed: from the results of research carried out by dozens of academics and institutions, those that proved themselves to be determining factors for improving student learning were gathered, such as professionalization of teachers, access to pre-school education and the possession of textbooks,<sup>1</sup> to mention just some examples.

The successful individual experiences produced by specialized research may be understood as floating signifiers enunciated in a chain of equivalencies that condensed the meaning of educational quality proposed by each organization and eventually gave form to a *universal*. Thus, the content of this *universal* has as a reference point a series of *particulars* that, when enunciated, give meaning to the focal point of quality, or, stated differently, in order to understand the meaning of educational quality we must refer to the series of academic studies and the particular contributions that in the decades of the eighties and nineties offered elements and proposals intended to remedy educational deficiencies in the so-called “developing” countries.

Besides tracing the particulars or floating signifiers that were revisited in order to offer a meaning for educational quality, another reference point for understanding what is proposed when speaking about this topic in international organizations refers us necessarily to the inclusion and exclusion of meanings, or more concretely, of research studies. It is in this operation of inclusion and exclusion of research studies where the nuances with regard to the meaning of educational quality come in for each of the organizations because, although they coincide in some sources, such as the works of Lockheed and Verspoor or Heyneman, we also see that other research studies are taken up by only one of them, which explains the interpretations that each organization offers for the signifier in question. It can be pointed out that the revisited results are due to the organization’s own conception with regard to its interest in educational subjects, since the World Bank (1994) prefers to focus on those works that refer to *productive functions*, UNESCO-OREALC (1992) adopts the experiences that were successful at the classroom level; while EFA includes, in addition, approaches taken from the social sciences, that is, humanistic, behaviorist, critical and indigenous approaches, as well as adult education (EFA, 2004 35-38). Thus, the revisited organizations *hope* to understand the concept “in all its complexity” and not only its “main manifestations”, because although UNESCO focuses on the classroom, it does not completely leave out processes occurring outside the school and that have to do with educational performance; while the WB also does not completely leave out matters of educational development in the classroom, for example.

However, it is not only through research in the eighties and nineties that we can understand the emergence of educational quality, but rather, we must try to understand the need to conduct such research, the motives that lead academics and organizations to look for new indicators for improvement of school performance. This has to do with the representation of a

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<sup>1</sup> For a detailed reference to all of the elements that came to signify educational quality for each of the international agencies, the reader may refer to my master’s thesis “La calidad educativa entre lo global y lo local. El peregrinaje de un significante de plenitud” [Educational Quality Between the Global and the Local. The Journey of a Signifier of Fulfillment] (2009) DIE-Cinvestav, where I show the meaning that each one of them contained in the signifier of quality, in addition to proposing the equivalencies and differences they present in this construction.

series of deficiencies in schooling at the elementary level that need to be remedied, and especially with the change in priorities from the quantitative to the qualitative.

## **Structural Dislocation in the Educational Sphere: An International Interpretation**

As it is formerly mentioned, a major part of research in the decade of the 1980s mainly, and in the decade of the 1990s, had the explicit purpose of “finding” the variables that would have an influence on the improvement of student performance in school, since there had been growing debate regarding critical conditions in the educational sector at the elementary level that required prompt attention.

The deficiencies and weaknesses of educational systems in developing countries were represented in different ways by international organizations. According to the World Bank, some of the conditions in Latin America and the Caribbean (LA and C) at the time showed that “in all countries in the region, primary education continues to be affected by low performance, high rates of repetition of grades and continues to lag compared not only to developed countries, but also to many Asian countries with similar per capita income” (WB, 1994, 17). In addition, this agency pointed out at great length the limitations in teacher performance, declaring that “students who enter teaching have a low academic profile and low socioeconomic status” (WB, 1994, 77), and that teachers were inefficient in organizing the time spent on teaching; they used the same traditional methodology for all types of students in any situation, and were unable to maintain discipline in class (WB, 1994, 77-82).

Another critical situation observed by the Bank in the systems of LA and C were the indicators and data gathered by the ministers of education, most of which focused on obtaining information regarding quantitative matters in the educational process, that is, number of students served, number of students graduated, number of students failed, etc. According to the organization, it was necessary to begin to place greater emphasis on qualitative processes and indicators that would provide information regarding those elements that would help identify the variables for effective learning.

For UNESCO-OREALC, critical conditions also existed in elementary education, especially with regard to the inequality with which education reached children. In their view, not everyone had access to the same type of education, since students from impoverished environments did not receive the same learning opportunities. Thus, the organization described educational systems as promoters of inequality:

If one seriously considers the disparity of conditions in which children of different social groups go to school, it is evident that teaching children of poor families and deprived groups requires greater resources and efforts in order to close the gap between their own culture and the school culture (1992, 32).

Along with the need to make the actions of educational policy more equal so that their beneficial effects would have actual repercussions on the populations most affected by poverty, this agency placed one of the deficiencies in education on the indicators managed by statistical systems, which were mainly related to problems of coverage:

This type of information was a perfect response to the need to expand the systems, when the main interest of countries was making learning universal...today, when the important things are the content and processes of the educational experience, information is required that shows how and how much students learn (UNESCO-OREALC, 1992, 25).

Thus, in the face of a lack of policies that would effectively reach populations characterized as “vulnerable,” a compensatory scheme of focalization was proposed for the purpose of concentrating certain programs and assuring that specific resources reached these sectors of the population traditionally identified in indigenous communities or outlying urban areas. In the same manner, the lack of reliable data on how to improve children’s learning and educational results allowed the agency to complement quantitative indicators with more qualitative type variables.

For its part, in the cited document *The Quality Imperative* (2004), EFA also presented a general view of instability where national policies are rebuked for focusing for decades only on the quantitative aspect of education without taking into account factors that impact educational performance. For this organization, the insufficient allocation of economic resources to the sector (presumably capable of being eased by the external aid that this agency coordinated); the lack of organization for the effective use of time in the classroom, as well as the unreliability of data provided by information systems in the poorer countries, are all factors that produce a situation that must be overcome.

This critical situation can be seen as the impulse that prompted the need for specialists in education to carry out research in order to “detect” the variables that could impact in improving educational performance, that is, those not focused primarily on quantifying the number of students, schools, books, etc., but rather that would show how books helped students learn more; or how teachers could modify the ways they interacted with children so that they responded more adequately. It was precisely the results of this “successful” academic output that provided the factors that, according to the analytical results, determine educational results and effective learning, or in other words, these academic works provided the elements that came to represent educational quality. We can thus explain the extensive output during the 1980s and 1990s that the organizations gathered and condensed into their own idea of educational quality.

In addition to the foregoing, this set of failures detected in educational systems, this set of deficiencies represented in the disorganization of time in the classroom, in the scarce preparation of teachers, or in the poor effectiveness of the “developing” countries systems for gathering information, make up an overall critical situation from which it is possible to see that current conditions no longer respond to the needs of students and educational institutions at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. All of these deficiencies make up a chain of equivalencies that summarizes the need to change focus: it is no longer enough for children to enter and leave school; what now must be assured is that these children really learn in their passage through it.

## **The Repercussions in México**

In contrast to international organizations, which explicitly recognize that they revisit the results provided by research studies from 1980 and 1990 to establish their own concept of educational quality, a similar process is not so evident on the national level; nevertheless, what we can observe clearly is a transference of the meanings used by these organizations frames of reference to the proposals in Mexican educational policy.

A major part of the elements proposed in the documents of the World Bank (1994), UNESCO-OREALC (1992) and Education for All (2004) were taken up by the documents that regulate national educational policy; but rather than presenting the symbolic messages forwarded from one context to the other, it is more useful for the purposes of this paper to explain how the logic of the representation of a generalized crisis at the elementary level was transferred to the national educational discourse. In the case of the Acuerdo Nacional para la Modernización de la Educación Básica (ANMEB, 1992) [National Accord for the

Modernization of Elementary Education] it is declared that “there is a clear consensus on the need to transform the educational system. This social demand, widespread both across the country’s geography as well as among sectors of society, is for quality education” (ANMEB, 1992, 55).

In addition to the foregoing, the Accord describes as especially critical the working conditions of teachers; the centralized organization of the educational system; as well as “deficiencies” in the curricula and study programs at the time. Thus, the Accord proposes to remedy the deficiencies in the educational sector through policies for the training of teachers, decentralization and changes in curricular content.

In the Programa de Desarrollo Educativo 1995-2000 (PDE) [Program for Educational Development] it is declared that “although historical progress has been enormous, elementary education has still not reached everyone” (PDE, 1995, 22) and mentions especially the backwardness prevalent among the Indian population, migrant day-laborers and residents of marginalized urban areas. In consonance with the ANMEB, signed three years before the presentation of this program, centralized organization is exhibited as the factor responsible for the inadequate attention to the specific needs of regions and of the country’s diverse social groups.

In the case of the Programa Nacional de Educación 2001-2006 (PNE) [National Education Program 2001-2006], the need for greater equality among the most impoverished and marginalized populations in the educational process —migrant, indigenous and marginalized children— is repeated once again. Following the course initiated by the ANMEB, the program also establishes the need to promote more effective management, emphasized especially in the dynamic of social participation in the school. In addition, PNE establishes that “in the scenario that is taking shape, it will be necessary to open an extensive debate regarding the role of new technologies...tending toward the definition of a national policy that will allow for orienting the potentialities of new technologies to the benefit of education and national development” (2001: 36); this explicitly proposes the need to discuss and incorporate the new Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) to satisfy the demands of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

These broad outlines, in which the critical conditions and deficiencies of the national educational system are recognized, summarize in a particular evolutionary interpretation the relationship between quantity and quality.

## **From Quantity to Quality: Establishing the New Mythical Space of Representation**

In this section it will be firstly considered the interpretation of the quantity-quality relationship presented in the mentioned international organizations, and then show the specificity that this interpretation acquired in its transference to México’s context. This will allow me to present the central argument of this paper: the emergence of a new mythical space of representation that purports to remedy the deficiencies in the educational sector that drew attention during the last decades, and their characterization as hegemonic imaginary.

The World Bank document that I have been working with throughout this paper states:

The countries that still do not have a sufficient number of places in primary education are Haiti, the Dominican Republic, El Salvador and Guatemala. With the exception of isolated rural areas and certain outlying urban zones, the rest of the countries in the region have achieved the quantitative goal of having sufficient physical places in primary education to tend to the school-age population (WB, 1994, 17).

In addition to the foregoing, it declares that countries in the region are immersed in a transitional demographic dynamic, in which the school-age population, between six and twelve years, will tend to show a reduction in growth rates, so that the demand for this educational level will contract progressively. Thus, “given that the cumulative deficit will be less pressing, perhaps it will be possible to focus on qualitative aspects” (WB, 1994, 9). So the agency believes that once the goal of universal coverage has been achieved in most of the so-called “developing” countries, it is possible to focus attention on the qualitative aspects of the system, on learning and on the functioning of schools, in other words, on the educational quality. In the same way, UNESCO-OREALC coincides with the Bank in that the new priorities demanded by the context at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> cannot be resolved with simple universal access to the elementary level:

When the goals of coverage and universalization of education at the primary level, which concentrated attention and efforts in the 1970s, were achieved to an important degree, concern for insuring that students actually learned what the school tried to teach them began to emerge naturally. More than going through school, there begins to be interest in students obtaining good levels of performance during the period in which they remain in school. This change of interest in the planners determined that the central issue during the decade of the 80s was the need to insure that the school provides the student with optimal conditions for learning and the question of educational quality emerged linked to this need. It is evident that the idea of quality appears only when the goals of expanding access have been fulfilled (UNESCO-OREALC, 1992, 33-34).

The conditions that produced the change of goals from the quantitative to the qualitative have to do, then, with the so-called “demographic transition,” which projects a reduction in the population demanding elementary level education, as well as fulfillment of the goal of universal coverage, which reveals the system’s deficiencies in the face of demands for “effective” learning.

In this same vein, the EFA document states that “education is a set of qualitatively defined processes and results. The number of children who learn is, by definition, a secondary aspect: the satisfaction of filling spaces known as ‘schools’ with children does not even respond to quantitative objectives, unless effective education is imparted in the classroom” (2004, 31). A progressivism logic underlies the three proposals, which presents educational processes as if they were being improved with the passage of time, as if we were immersed in a predetermined history and in an ascending race that promises access to perfection in the future. This transference from one state to another (to refer to it in some way) is even alluded to in UNESCO-OREALC as “natural,” losing sight of the historical dimension that has been distilled around educational processes throughout time.

This evolutionary type of interpretation has been transferred to the national context to such a degree that it is included in the documents that regulate educational policy, not without being assigned new meaning beforehand, according to the specific needs of our country. The ANMEB, for example, declares that:

From 1921 to date, notable progress has been made in coverage: the average level of schooling has gone from one grade to six [...] attention to demand at the primary school level is around 90 percent [...] Despite the advances, the challenge of educational coverage persists [and] the quality of elementary education is deficient” (ANMEB, 1992, 56-57).

In the case of the Mexican interpretation of the decade of the 1990s, although it was recognized that the state had endeavored to provide a high level of coverage throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century, it was asserted that there were still undeniably discouraging conditions that were

not allowing universal coverage at the elementary level. This condition was that the most impoverished and marginalized populations were being left without access to education and this did not allow coverage to be achieved one hundred percent. For the ANMEB, and later for the PDE (1995-2000) and the PNE (2001-2006) as well, this situation was to be corrected through compensatory policies that concentrated extraordinary resources and “efforts” on those populations that represented the obstacle to achieving the quantitative objective. It was precisely the most impoverished sectors or those considered as “minorities” or in “special” conditions, such as child day laborers, indigenous groups or those who live in marginalized urban contexts, which became the center of attention. In order to be able to speak of universal coverage, these underprivileged groups had to be assured entry into school. This is being carried out under the criterion of “equality,” which was strongly tied to quality in the national educational framework, as is evidenced by the following quote: “The challenge for elementary education continues to be coverage, but along with quality [...] coverage and quality are intimately linked. Both combine to achieve greater equality” (PDE, 1995, 30). In the same manner, the PNE considers the challenge of quality along with equality, although in this document the need to switch educational objectives from universal coverage to quality is more strongly emphasized:

For decades, national population growth forced the system to work overtime to attend growing demand for elementary education services [...] efforts were concentrated on accelerated construction of schools, massive production of free textbooks and training or preparation of teachers [...] Today, elementary education has been made the responsibility of the states and the population whose age would be suitable for studying this type of education has stopped growing, which represents an opportunity to concentrate national efforts on improving the quality of services and differentiated attention toward vulnerable groups (PNE, 2001, 111).

The deficiencies and critical situation of the educational system presented in the previous section—the effects of the “demographic transition” in which the base of the population pyramid tends to become more and more narrow, thus creating less demand for elementary level education; as well as the end of the goal of universal coverage due to its supposed recent completion, constitute conditions that favor the interpretation of a new horizon of fulfillment.

It was from the APD categories that educational quality was interpreted as the new mythical space of representation, where the subjects are invited to see themselves in a more perfected fashion. In Laclau, the myth emerges in structural dislocation: “the work of the myth consists in closing a dislocated space by constituting a new space of representation” (1990, 77). When documents from international organizations and from Mexican educational policy establish that elementary education is in critical condition, we can observe a structural dislocation in this diagnosis. A whole series of deficiencies exhibited in the last decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century form a chain of equivalencies that come to a focal point in universal coverage, which concentrates the representation of all the national and international insufficiencies in the educational sphere, because although it is stated that we have almost achieved the goal of one hundred percent access, it is asserted at the same time that it is not enough, that it is no longer a challenge to be achieved, that it is not enough that children enter school, but that there must be a guarantee that they actually learn in their passage through the classroom. This constitutes sufficient reason to switch priorities to a new mythical space where we can represent our most ambitious desires: educational quality.

A new myth does not begin from scratch, because the dissatisfaction with and the insufficiency of the actions focused on attending to the quantitative aspects of education constitute precisely the possibility for the emergence of a new restructuring myth, as well as the raw material from which the promise of fulfillment of the emerging myth will be extracted. The quality myth gathers the shreds of the broken down dominant structural objectivity and rearranges them in a new meaning. Thus, the goal of coverage is not



completely left aside, since it is now enunciated along with the criterion of equality to occupy its place as one more element within the signifying chain of the new myth of quality, so that coverage continues to be a need, but only linked to equality.

Laclau also posits that “what the mythical space is opposed to is not the ‘structurality’ of the new dominant structure, but rather to the de-structuring effects that distort the latter” (1990, 78). In the presented case, educational quality does not deny the importance of the quantitative goal of coverage nor of the measures taken throughout the century to try to make it universal. What the myth of educational quality comes to question is the relevance of continuing to regulate educational policies through the central theme of coverage now that—supposedly—almost one hundred percent of the children whose age makes them candidates to enter the elementary level have gained access. It also questions that information systems focus only on quantifying the number of schools, students and teachers, instead of generating information and data about the factors that impact in improving student performance; it questions, in short, that having focused actions for so long time on the goal of universality has contributed to putting aside other equally important educational factors. The new myth tries to fix these deficiencies from two angles, each one of which satisfies its functions: offering literal content or exalting its sense of fulfillment.

With the emerging myth of educational quality as a starting point, indicators or variables are offered in order to understand what is being said when speaking about educational quality, that is, the myth can express a concrete and literal content. We will clarify with an example: as we saw in the first part of this paper, international organizations supposedly offer a meaning for educational quality in each one of their documents; indeed, the objective of each one of the texts was to offer countries a series of indicators or variables that, according to educational research in the 1980s and 1990s, had proved their effectiveness for improving education. Thus, each one of the organizations presented a certain meaning for educational quality. Many of these meanings were transferred to the national sphere in the documents that regulate Mexican educational policy, where we can see what is being said when speaking about educational quality.

But the myth also has the function of offering a sense of fulfillment aside from any other explicit meaning. According to Laclau “in many cases the discourse of a ‘new order’ is accepted by numerous sectors, not because they are particularly attracted to its concrete content, but rather because it is the discourse of an order, of something that is presented as a credible alternative to the generalized crisis and dislocation” (Laclau, 1990, 81-82). It is precisely this function of the emerging myth of educational quality that is being exalted today, that is, presenting itself as pure fulfillment; as a promise of a better future; as the series of measures that will repair a critical situation resulting from having focused solely on questions of coverage; as a response to the new demands generated in the context of the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup>.

Thus, when the function of metaphorical representation of fulfillment is exalted more than its literal content, the myth becomes *imaginary*; and it is precisely this function which has prevailed in the most widely shared usage of educational quality.

## **Educational Quality as Hegemonic Imaginary**

During the last two decades the idea has been forming that educational quality is good, beneficial, desirable, that it will compensate all our insufficiencies, rectify errors of the past and improve elementary education. The need to present a grand, all-encompassing project where all the expectations of what can be achieved in the educational sector may be deposited is possible thanks to the radically ambiguous and empty nature of the signifier chosen for this purpose, for although in different projects and documents the intent is to offer a positive idea

of the variables and indicators that are posited when speaking about it, the exaltation of the sense of fulfillment above and beyond any specific content has made it possible to situate itself as the core idea of policies and programs in the sector. There are many examples in México: the Programa Escuelas de Calidad (PEC) [Quality Schools Program]; the Alianza por la Calidad de la Educación (ACE) [Alliance for Quality in Education]; even the Programa Cubano-Oaxaqueño de Mejoramiento de la Calidad Educativa en Oaxaca (Meceox) [Cuban-Oaxacan Program for the Improvement of Educational Quality in Oaxaca, México]; quality as the centerpiece of political party proposals; as a slogan in ads for private schools, etc.

The peculiarity of this signifier is its ability to convey almost any desire we deposit in it, and it is its position as imaginary that has allowed it to encompass different types of demands, from different points of view, from different subjects, so that it has become generalized as the great educational demand of the moment.

## Final Reflections

In conclusion, I will present the relevance of preparing this paper with the tools of Political Discourse Analysis.

Although I assume that all research work must go into detail with primary sources, my epistemological position allows me to propose that these cannot be treated as documents that hold the truth: that is, the documents do not speak for themselves. Working from this perspective recognizes mediation between the texts and the researcher's reflections, so that the resulting object of investigation constitutes a possible construct—among many others—with regard to the same subject. The theoretical model constitutes a flexible framework of tools or, to put it another way, a telescopic lens from which we observe a disorganized set of objects: to observe them close up does not mean we can touch them immediately and thus have access to all of their determinations. The most that this lens can offer us is to get closer to the object, which will permit us to say something about it and organize it in such a way as to make it intelligible. In this sense, I conceive knowledge as a construct of the researcher, but always in consonance with a relationship of tension between the indispensable empirical model and the logic of intellection that makes it possible to give the object coherence, in my specific case, the theoretical contributions that make PDA possible. So, in summary, it allowed me:

1. To trace the meanings of educational quality used by international organizations from the particular-universal relationship, and of the floating signifiers that, articulated, distilled in said signifier.
2. To understand the operation of inclusion and exclusion in research studies that gave educational quality content in the case of each international agency, which made it possible for me to observe the specificities and nuances in the interpretations proposed by each one.
3. To understand the process of the emergence of educational quality from the interpretation of a generalized crisis in educational systems, particularly at the elementary level.
4. To interpret the change in priorities in the completion of the coverage myth and the emergence of the new restructuring myth of educational quality.
5. To present educational quality as an all-encompassing, radically ambiguous and empty hegemonic imaginary—and for this same reason, productive—that has been widely generalized in educational contexts and has been transferred by multiple actors given its presentation as a promise of fulfillment that will remedy educational insufficiencies at the elementary level.

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